

Charles Kao, Nobel-winning optical fiber pioneer, dies at 84

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Charles K. Kao, who shared a 2009 Nobel Prize in physics for pioneering work in optical fiber technology that helped to lay the foundation for modern telecommunications, has died. He was 84.

Kao, a former vice chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, died Sunday in hospice care, according to the Hong Kong government and news reports. He suffered from Alzheimer's disease but no cause of death was announced.

Kao was a researcher at ITT Corp. when in 1966 he and a colleague published a paper that showed pure glass fibers could be used for communication. That technology, along with developments in lasers, gave rise to a new industry.

Kao's work "made the internet possible," The South China Morning Post newspaper said in an editorial.

Charles Kuen Kao was born Nov. 4, 1933, in Shanghai, according to a biography released by the Nobel Foundation. His mother wrote poetry and his father was an American-educated judge.

The family left in 1948 for Hong Kong, where Kao finished high school. He received a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Woolwich Polytechnic in London.

Kao was vice chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in

1987-96. He helped to found its department of electrical engineering in 1970 during a leave from ITT's British subsidiary.

Kao was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2004. He and his wife, Gwen, set up a foundation in 2010 to raise awareness of the disease and promote support for people who care for sufferers.

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